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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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* *Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of November 25, 1940.*

† *"Twelfth Night" opened last Tuesday, November 19th, at the St. James Theatre*

† *"Horse Fever" opened last Saturday, November 23rd, at the Mansfield Theatre. (Newspaper Critics' reviews in next week's issue.)*

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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New York Post	New York Daily News
New York Herald Tribune	New York World-Telegram

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

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"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 20, 1940*

Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans Give Character to "Twelfth Night"

"Twelfth Night," comedy by William Shakespeare. Revived by the N. Y. Theatre Guild and Gilbert Miller at the St. James Theatre, New York, Nov. 19, 1940.

★ ★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

SHAKESPEARE'S "Twelfth Night," to speak the truth of it, has been fair game for all manner of Shakespearean actors for a good many years. For most of the 339 years, in fact, since first it was written to provide an interlude for a feast of the "benchers" of Middle Temple in the London of 1601.

I myself have seen it done with as great seriousness as the text permits by the high and mighty of the profession, and as a sort of sophomore romp by stock companies and the lowlier traveling troupes.

Take it at its worst and it can be the goshawfullest bore in all the classic repertory. Or taken at its best, when the Viola has charm and a gift for romance, and the Orsino and Olivia, the Malvolio and Aguecheek and the Maria and Sir Toby are made a convincing part of the picture, it can become for two-thirds its length a happy evening in the theatre.

Last the Best

The best revival in all its parts in our memory, I think, is now on view at the St. James Theatre, where Helen Hayes last night played the Viola and Maurice Evans was the Malvolio. And where the assisting company played consistently and brilliantly up to these leaders.

The common custom has been to play "Twelfth Night" almost exclusively for the Viola, and to make a farcical romp of the rest of it. In the Hayes-Evans revival, Margaret Webster, who directed it, has undertaken to give value to the romance and to curb the rowdiness of the Sir Toby-Maria-Aguecheek trio.

There are no caricatures in her grouping. The Aguecheek does not step out of character to prove how funny he thinks an effeminate coxcomb might be. The Malvolio is not a heavy-minded Shakespearean star, barren of comedy impulse, lacking utterly the comic spirit (as even such high ones as Irving and Sothern were), but a player with a true and fine sense of comedy without caricature.

The Orsino is not a sighing sap, though heaven knows it is hard to make anything else of him if you follow the lines and the dictated business. The Olivia is still a foolish lady who pretends to be fooled by a fledgling youth, but we can take that.

Sir Toby and Maria, Aguecheek and Feste, come far enough out of the scullery to be appreciably as human in their reactions as they are orderly and presentable in their dress. And all this makes for some semblance of sanity in the recital of the frolic that it usually has lacked.

Of course, it is still largely Viola's evening, as it must be with any actress possessing Helen Hayes' particularly persuasive charm and personality playing that befuddled young person. But never does this Viola intrude upon the performances of the others.

Because she is doubly earnest in her enterprise, first to do justice to Shakespeare and second to prove her right to be accepted with the other great ladies of her profession she makes the early scenes beautifully important.

Beating Shakespeare

Her pretty terror at playing the boy, her confession of dismay at discovering her love for Orsino, her simulated swagger to carry off the deception, her reading of all the test speeches—these are so beautifully timed and played as to bring a mist to the eyes of her admirers.

And though as the plot wears thin, and repetition dulls the edge of interest, and the final matching of Cesario and Sebastian sort of explodes the whole foolish business—even though Shakespeare deserts her, she still is the splendid actress who definitely has won her place in the company of the great.

The Evans Malvolio is far and away the best I have seen. He plays the majordomo cockolorum with a bit of a Cockney accent, which may outrage some but is all right with me—anything that improves Malvolio is that much gain—but never once does he overplay so much as a line, and never once does he fail in suggesting a believable eccentric.

Wesley Addy's Orsino, too, seems a human kind, and Addy is not by the gods' choice a romantic actor. Wallace Acton's Aguecheek is also kept within bounds. Even the silly duel scene is better than it usually is, thanks partly to this type of fooling.

Sophie Stewart is a nicely feminine Olivia, June Walker's Maria a hearty and healthy maid, Mark Smith's Sir Toby a tub of sack, but always reasonably acceptable. And Donald Burr, though not a particularly festive Feste, sings well and reads intelligently.

The production, by Stewart Chaney, is handsome and simple. It is all very superior Shakespeare, in fact. Thanks, again, to the stars and Margaret Webster.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 20, 1940*

Viola and Malvolio

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

ALTHOUGH "Twelfth Night" contains some of the worst features of Elizabethan comedy, it has charm, grace and loveliness, and these saving qualities are captured to abundance in this handsome and skillful new production. With Miss Hayes playing Viola with rare beauty, with Mr. Evans offering a brilliant and curiously touching cockney Malvolio, with Miss Margaret Webster's shrewd direction again lively and inventive, with splendid sets and costumes by Stewart Chaney and with an attractive accompanying score by Paul Bowles, this frayed and often painful comedy becomes again a thing of youth and gayety. Even those incredibly boring scenes of drunken comedy between Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek seem interludes to be skipped over as quickly as possible, rather than the fatal handicaps to entertainment they can so readily become. This production of "Twelfth Night" is a tribute to the Theater Guild, to Gilbert Miller and to the dramatic season.

• • •

The chief news of the evening is, of course, Miss Hayes. This is her first Shakespearean appearance on Broadway, but she is completely and happily at home in it. Here is a portrayal of sweet and tender loveliness, so gracefully mixed with shrewd and winning comedy that it becomes a glowing delight. Whether in her confusion when Olivia is making love to her, her bewilderment when she is mistaken by Antonio for her twin brother, her terror at being forced into the duel with Sir Anthony, or in her wistful approaches to the unknowing Orsino, this Viola is an exquisite portrayal, lyric, warm, human, humorous and incredibly moving. In facing the great test of a difficult Shakespearean role, Miss Hayes not only lives up to her incomparable stature as an actress, but even increases it. If this presentation of the old play had no other virtue, it would be something for all theatergoers to see.

• • •

As for Mr. Evans, his Malvolio is the sort of performance that we have come to expect of him, which means, of course, that it is Shakespearean acting at its best. Elizabethan comedy today tends to seem not only boring but barbarous, and never was the Shakespearean humor more savage than in the mocking of Malvolio and his carrying-off to a madhouse. Ugly practical jokes seem no less unpleasantly brutal because they are played in the classic style. Thus the only way to act Malvolio and keep audiences from writhing in their seats at the treatment accorded him, is to make him not only pompous, stuffy and foolish but also human and a little touching in his fatuous attempts at dignity. The slight cockney accent, the desperate efforts to get all the h's in their right place, these things somehow add to the humanity of the unfortunate man, and the Evans characterization in both its humor and its understanding is one of high excellence. But the madhouse scene does remain one of discomfort.

• • •

It is my firm conviction that no actors in the world could make Sir Toby and Sir Andrew funny today. I do imagine that more in the direction of comedy might have been achieved than Mark Smith and Wallace Acton, who play the roles, ever manage, but their tasks were impossible ones from the start and there is no reason for blaming them severely. Shakespearean clowns are not comfortable roles these days, either, but Donald Burr, who can sing pleasantly, manages Feste with more ease than is ordinarily to be found in such parts. With the characters of Olivia and Orsino we come back to more recognizable grounds, and in these roles Miss Sophie Stewart and Wesley Addy are excellent. A more difficult feat, though, is performed by Miss June Walker, who actually makes Maria, the girl practical joker, a lively and a living person, despite the fact that the female Shakespearean comics are not much more entertaining than the masculine ones. Here is "Twelfth Night" in a delightful production.

"Twelfth Night"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 20, 1940*

Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' Is Gayly Revived at the St. James

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

APPARENTLY what the theater needs is to place its trust in Shakespeare. The Theater Guild and Gilbert Miller, having put their heads together and reached that conclusion, brought "Twelfth Night" into the St. James last evening. Helen Hayes plays Viola, Maurice Evans is a Cockney Malvolio and over them Margaret Webster has waved that majestic director's wand she keeps handy for such occasions. The result is all sparkle and delight.

"Twelfth Night" has, of course, both those qualities to begin with. It is full of prankishness and invention and its intricate plot is tangled with the lightest of hands. It is full of those "quotations" which some innocent once found on first being exposed to a Shakespeare play; it is full, too, of songs and frolics and even the court fool is often merry. It is a small, gay play and it asks only recognition of its gayety. This sort of recognition is, however, the kind most rarely accorded to Shakespeare.

Miss Webster and Miss Hayes and Mr. Evans, and almost all of those associated with them, laugh off all gloomy reverence. Mr. Evans's Cockney accent is a case in point, and somehow this device gives point to poor, ridiculous, much put upon Malvolio. He is a pompous spoil-sport as he emerges from Mr. Evans's astute, inventive playing. He struggles anxiously with his H's. When he is bid run after the disguised Viola to carry her the ring his horrified "Run?" is a summary of shocked dignity. The jest which took Malvolio strutting, cross-gartered, before his lady is still a little cruel for modern taste, but Mr. Evans's acting almost justifies it. Perhaps, carried away by his own humanity, he does once or twice make Malvolio a figure rather for pity than for sport, but almost always he makes the steward as comically ridiculous as he must have seemed to the less sentimental eyes of the Elizabethans.

Miss Hayes has no such problem with Viola, one of the most human and touching of Shakespeare's minor heroines. She is captivating and jaunty; she can explore both the humor and the humanity out of Viola's curious predicament, loved for her boyish charm by Olivia and herself loving, hopelessly because of her masculine disguise, the noble Duke Orsino. And she has, too, the instinct and the timing, and almost above everything else, the clear enunciation, for the poetry in the role.

Malvolio and Viola seldom meet, so that only now and then, and briefly, are both the stars together on the stage. Other parts are almost as important, and the other parts are, almost without exception, beautifully played. June Walker, for example, is a lusty Maria; Wallace Acton a vacant-eyed and comical Sir Andrew Aguecheek. No actor is ever entirely disarming self—frank and simple and lighthearted. The comedy of her performance is most enjoyable when she trips over the dilemmas of her masquerade in boy's clothes. When she first suspects that Olivia is falling in love with her, and when she is mischievously pushed into the duel with Sir Andrew, Miss Hayes's gentleness and innocence of comedy style are especially enjoyable. Miss Hayes takes the whole part in a spirit of womanly good-will. But, at the risk of pedantry, isn't there more to the part of Viola than this—breeding and even sophistication of character, grace of motion, music of verse? Although Miss Hayes has played in verse drama before now, she is a prosy speaker in "Twelfth Night," and sometimes her postures are more rural than Illyrian, and the mood she conveys is more pathetic than romantic.

• • •

An old hand at Shakespeare, Mr. Evans is superb. He is acting a Cockney Malvolio, which is an amusing idea. As usual, he has designed the character with imaginative detail, never forgetting the point of the scene he is playing. Without truckling to the customers for easy laughs, he can catch pomposity in the tiniest suggestion of a strut or in the fulsomeness of ceremony. A master of Shakespearean dialogue, he can speak it for sense without losing the rhythm. "Run?" he inquires politely when Olivia bids him run after the Duke's messenger. It is only one word. But somehow Mr. Evans puts into it the disdain, the fastidiousness, the vanity and alarm of a fatuous underling. Put that down as acting.

Every one should feel fortunate in having June Walker play Maria. She speaks clearly, which is a blessing, but beyond that she is honestly hearty in expression of character, running around the stage with genuine excitement over the mischief Maria has invented—full and free in merriment. Mark Smith's Sir Toby is musical comedy fooling, much too self-conscious for the pleasure of an audience, and Wallace Acton's Sid Andrew is silly. Miss Walker can laugh either one of them into a neutral corner; she glows with festive spirit.

• • •

Some of the other parts are pleasantly acted. Sophie Stewart makes a handsome and accomplished Olivia. Wesley Addy does well by the love-sick Orsino. Although Donald Burr cannot make much out of the Feste's chop-logic, he is a noble skipper and he sings the verses enchantingly. Stewart Chaney's settings are marvelously efficient, though lacking somewhat in romantic beauty, and his costumes are lively and inventive. Paul Bowles has composed music without Elizabethan affectation, more in a spirit of liveliness than of innocence.

As a holiday revel this "Twelfth Night" is rowdy, dry-humored and briskly paced. What it lacks is the part of Shakespeare's genius that made him a poet.

'TWELFTH NIGHT'

Shakespeare's comedy, arranged in two acts and fifteen scenes; directed by Margaret Webster; settings and costumes by Stewart Chaney; music by Paul Bowles; presented at the St. James Theater on November 19, 1940, by the Theater Guild and Gilbert Miller. The cast:

Orsino	Wesley Addy
Curio	George Keane
Valentine	Philip Huston
Viola	Helen Hayes
Sea Captain	Anthony Ross
Sir Toby Belch	Mark Smith
Maria	June Walker
Sir Andrew Aguecheek	Wallace Acton
Feste	Donald Burr
Olivia	Sophie Stewart
Malvolio	Maurice Evans
Antonio	Ellis Irving
Sebastian	Alex Courtnay
Fabian	Raymond Johnson
Attendant to Olivia	June Brehm
Officer	Irving Morrow
Soldier	Anthony Ross
Sir Topas	William Hansen
A Page	Osbert Chevers

Watchman, Sailors, Soldiers, Musicians, and attendants to Olivia and Orsino—Jacqueline Paige, Larry Gates, Donald Buka, Max Leavitt.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 20, 1940*

Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans Appear in a Revival of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WITH the advice and consent of William Shakespeare, Helen Hayes and Maurice Evans are opening the Theatre Guild's twenty-third subscription season together. They are appearing in a revival of "Twelfth Night," which opened at the St. James last evening. The list of illustrious names includes two others: Gilbert Heron Miller appears as co-producer, and Margaret Webster has directed. With a battery of talent as devastating as that, you probably expect to be blown out of the theatre with brilliance. But to this courier of stage tidings the Guild "Twelfth Night" seems to be a performance of mixed blessings—good in spots, very good in spots, but unable to achieve the full gayety that it strives to evoke from one of Shakespeare's sweetest comedies.

• • •

As her previous productions of Shakespeare have indicated, Miss Webster is all for pulling the master out of the schoolrooms and museums and setting him on the stage for modern enjoyment. "Twelfth Night" does not surrender to robustiousness as easily as "Richard II" and "Hamlet." Compounded of graces and horseplay, of music and slapstick, of romance and storybook makebelieve, it does not drop into a pattern, and perhaps it needs lightness and beauty quite as much as skulduggery. The beauty of the current "Twelfth Night" is overladen with a desire to be funny at any cost.

As Viola, Miss Hayes is very much her fortunate who has to play a Shakespeare clown, but Donald Burr is a delightful Feste. Sophie Stewart is beautiful and light handed as Olivia and Alex Courtnay, lodged in the not very rewarding role of Viola's brother, Sebastian, manages not only to play it excellently but to look surprisingly like Miss Hayes. (It is possible, of course, that nature has helped him here.) Mark Smith's Sir Toby is neither very flexible nor very understandable in the early scenes, but later his playing takes on a fine unction.

But perhaps we are getting lost in details. This production of "Twelfth Night" never loses itself so, whatever a reviewer may do. It is quick and light and all of a piece. Stewart Chaney has made it handsome and Miss Webster has shaken from it every grain of library dust. And so we are granted the happiest evening of this straggling season.